JDC International Centre for Community Development

Choosing Each Other: Exogamy in the Jewish Community of Buenos Aires

Ezequiel Erdei

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Prologue

"Mixed Marriage" or, more commonly, "marrying a goy" - how many times have we heard these expressions in our families and our communities without, in most cases, being followed by a catastrophic tone?

Mixed marriage is seen by many community and religious leaders as the main threat to the continuity of Judaism. It is perceived by many Jewish families as a calamity and as a break with tradition. Yet it is a reality that is increasingly present in both our country and the world. The most reliable statistics show mixed marriage rates around 50% in Argentina, more than 50% in the U.S., 40% in Western Europe, 60-70% in Eastern Europe and 75% in the former Soviet Union[1]. Furthermore, recent studies about Jewish genetics suggest that the origins of European Jews show significant evidence of genetic mixing with local European populations, demonstrating in part that "mixed marriage" was a more common phenomenon than originally thought[2].

What does this mean for the future of Judaism? The most accepted view suggests that marrying outside the ethno-religious group is an inexorable path toward assimilation, threatening the continuity of Jewish communities in the mid- and long-term. Mixed marriages, they argue, go against the most basic idea of continuation of Judaism. It is true that in many cases, one who marries outside the group they belong to does so as a "way out," as a form of repudiating Judaism.

However, recent studies in the United States have at the very least brought this idea into question, showing that while marrying a non-Jew is a factor that can predict the gradual disengagement of the individual and their offspring with Jewish life, the road to assimilation is not as linear as previously thought. Many individuals who marry non-Jews choose to actively maintain their Jewish identity. Mixed families decide to keep a Jewish home. Undoubtedly, this relates to times of postmodernity or "liquid modernity," to use the concept of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, in which there exists an expansion of "multiple identities" and re-centering of the individual around the "I" (no mention, of course, of the preponderance in our society of marriage "for love").

In Argentina, very little is known about this phenomenon beyond the statistical data provided by the Jewish Population Study of Buenos Aires published by the Latin American office of the JDC in 2005[3]. Even less is known about the motivations and life experiences of the people involved.

The merit of Ezequiel Erdei´s study is to listen to those who have chosen that path and to analyze the whys and hows. What are their life stories? What kind of experiences have they had with Jewish institutions? Why did they decide to marry a non-Jew? What do they want to transmit to their children? Do they identify with being a Jew? Would they like to participate with their family in community events?

With the publication of this work, JDC aims to generate a deep reflection that we hope will be useful for all Jewish institutions, whether religious, cultural or socio-athletic, in these extremely complex times. We hope that the study enriches the debate on a subject that, until now, has been little discussed.

Alberto Senderey

President JDC International Centre for Community Development (JDC-ICCD)

[1] See Sergio Della Pergolla, Jewish Demographic Policies, JPPPI, Jerusalem, 2011.

[2] Nicholas Wade, "Genes Suggest European Ashkenazi Women at Root of Family Tree," New York Times, October 8, 2013.

[3] Available online at: http://www.jdc-iccd.org/en/article/34/the-jewish-population-of-buenos-aires-a-socio-demographic-study

Acknowledgements

My interest in exogamy in the Jewish community dates back many years. The first time I gave serious thought to the issue was probably in 2003, while beginning preparations for the Estudio de la Población Judía de Buenos Aires (The Jewish Population of Buenos Aires: A Socio-demographic Study).

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Introduction

Two people choosing each other mutually, beyond the unavoidable romantic construct, embody an extremely complex social phenomenon, one of the most sincere metaphors of the societies we live in. This choice leads us to consider the mobility and degree of permeability of social boundaries; the integration, exclusion and ghettoization of ethnic and religious minorities; and the constant reconceptualization of categories such as inside/outside, familiar/strange.

In short, they are a strong indication of social change. Paraphrasing Egon Mayer in his book *Love and Tradition*, the motives for marriage, expressed in modern vocabulary, emphasize love, compatibility and mutual fulfilment, leaving little room for compliance, duty, respect for tradition and responsibility to ancestors and relatives (Mayer 1985).

Until recently, kinship systems still retained traces of the legacy inherited from the Middle Ages and the Pre-Modern era, when marriage was a moral duty and a social responsibility, when parents forged agreements with other families to marry their children together, when the decision was based on ensuring a transfer of wealth, glory and honour and guaranteeing descendents a "rank" or condition at least equal to that enjoyed by their ancestors. In more affluent families, marriage assured that a family name, inheritance and property would be passed on to future generations (Duby 1991; Giddens 1995).

Meanwhile, Jews socially segregated themselves from "Gentiles," immersed in a distinctively Jewish cultural life and education, along with strict adherence to religious law and its moral and aesthetic standards, largely separated from other social groups (Cohen 1988).

Love or romance, in their present form, were not preconditions for accepting a spouse, but rather the result of eventual cohabitation. As Giddens explains, the ideals of "romantic love," differentiated from the bonds of kinship, began to spread as recently as the nineteenth century; husbands and wives began to be seen as participants in a joint emotional venture. This had a significant effect on sexuality in that the pressure to form large families, a feature of virtually all Pre-Modern cultures, gave way to a strict tendency to limit family size. The ideals of romantic love are introduced directly into the ties emerging between freedom and self-realization (Giddens 1995).

The potential for exogamy in its present form (i.e. marriage with someone from a different community or group) was very low given that, as mentioned above, it was inhibited by community and family involvement as well as geographic and economic segregation. To illustrate the contextual nature of exogamy, Egon Mayer points out that by 1950 in the United States not only were the differences between Jews and non-Jews very clear, but the Jewish community itself was also very strongly divided, given that marriage between a Sephardic and an Ashkenazic Jew was just as unusual as marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew (Mayer 1985)[1].

In addition to and coinciding with group/family control, exogamy was also made exceptional by the gaze of the Other. Jews were seen by themselves and others as separate, easily identifiable with respect to their neighbours. This implied a clear distinction with respect to ethnic and religious boundaries, separating an "us" from "others," with little or no room for a middle ground.

At present, the differentiation between Jews and non-Jews has diminished, in both senses (Sarna 1994, 98:55-58), exogamous unions acting as a good indicator of the degree of integration and acceptance of ethnic minorities and highlighting, through this integration, the fuzziness of social, ethnic and/or religious boundaries. While classic assimilation theories see exogamy or mixed marriage as a fundamental step towards a complete loss

[1] This distinction is still used for descriptive purposes, but no longer represents a boundary for later generations.

of the distinction of minorities (Gordon 1964), more recent studies suggest that exogamy does not necessarily lead directly and irreversibly to the loss of identification so often mentioned in both revisions of classic theories (Alba and Nee 2003) and alternative models (Portes and Zhou 1993, 530:74-96), including studies on the specificities of the Jewish case (Barack Fishman 2004; McGinity 2009; Rein 2011).

Given that exogamy is a multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by issues that are both micro-social (community and family) and macro-social (inherent to all societies), efforts should be made to avoid the ideological polarization that defines "endogamy" and "exogamy" as rigid, antagonistic and irreconcilable categories.

Exogamy tends to be referred to as "mixed marriage," which reflects at least two major conceptual errors: a) it uses marriage as the only indicator of family or household composition in a society in which people are increasingly postponing marriage or simply forming civil unions or even common-law unions without getting married at all and b) the "mixed" nature of the union assumes that identity is a discrete and exhaustive category, defined solely according to whether an individual represents a classifiable entity in clearly distinguishable groups with an overall explanatory identity.

This presumption is secondary to the idea of the "melting pot[2]," critically revised following the emergence of theories of multiculturalism and the defence of differences. "Mixed" remains a largely socio-legal construct, an increasingly vague concept which simply leads to projected stereotypes (Rodriguez Garcia 2004). This socially stereotyped construct of a "mix" is in contrast to the idea of "pure," to mix is to deviate from an original purity. According to this view of exogamy, merely by existing, this type of union threatens the integrity and purity of the group in question.

Approaching Exogamy from a Different Angle

The role of exogamy in the postmodern era is the subject of intense debate, at the academic as well as the community level. Despite the intensity of the debate in Argentina, little or no information is available to social scientists, rabbis, educators and community leaders when seeking guidance in the discussion or even when deciding their position on the topic[3].

With the underlying question of Jewish continuity, unions between Jews and non-Jews have become a focus over the last several years. To what extent do these unions represent a threat to group survival? To what degree could they be considered an opportunity? Does exogamy represent the culmination of a loss of identity?

Beyond their individual perspectives, most observers agree on the following[4]:

- The fertility rate of Jewish families is below 2.2 children (the replacement fertility rate).
- Fewer Jews are emigrating to countries with large Jewish communities.
- The endogamic tendency of the Jewish community and high levels of education are resulting in couples forming later and, as a result, delaying the decision to\ have children.

[2] The metaphor of the melting pot refers to a society of heterogeneous migrants who become homogenous by harmoniously combining their origins to create a common culture, which could be called "national."

[3] Most available bibliography is based on analyses of the American Jewish community and, for obvious reasons, is in English. A good database containing articles by a variety of authors and from different perspectives can be found at http://www.bjpa.org/.

[4] For more details see (DellaPergola 2009:13-40).

- Jews are increasingly identifying as secular or at least non-religious[5].

Using the debates taking place in the United States as a reference point, we can see two major and closely related agendas: academic and political/institutional.

From an academic perspective, the debate is divided into two major trends, the "assimilationists", "traditionalists" or "pessimists" on the one hand, and the "transformationalists" or "optimists" on the other (Cohen 1988).

As Steven Cohen points out, this controversy does not allow for a simple analysis of the "facts," given that the conclusions are largely dependent on the dominant conceptual background of the analysis.

Basing their arguments on traditional Jewish values and the idea of a clearly distinguished group (with rules for entering and leaving), the "assimilationists" see exogamy as representing a direct threat to group survival. From this perspective, the past is always seen as better with its social segregation between Jews and Gentiles, nearly complete immersion in a distinctly Jewish cultural and educational life, strict adherence to religious law and the precedence of Jewish moral and aesthetic standards over general (or Gentile) ones, emphasizing community responsibility over individual decisions. The most insightful empirical arguments these observers give are based on decreasing levels of membership, commitment to Israel, Jewish education and religious observance, with a consequently minor distinction with respect to the non-Jewish world.

In turn, the "transformationalists" argue that while the shift from traditional to modern societies has led to significant changes in Jewish life, these changes do not represent a serious threat to Jewish continuity, emphasizing the ability Jews have for redefining Judaism and their means of attaining social cohesion. This is a significantly more optimistic view; the expansion and almost complete acceptance of Jews in a broader society does not damage or threaten Jewish identity, which should not be treated as immutable. Their arguments are related to the "quality" of Jewish life rather than the "quantity", the promotion of social values and shared cultural preferences and interests. At the same time, they emphasize the potential "advantage" in quantitative terms. According to the main hypothesis underlying this view, when two Jews marry each other there is a high probability they will form a Jewish household, while when a Jew marries a non-Jew, there is a possibility that two Jewish households will be created. According to this logic, there are at least three options (Barack Fishman 2004):

- Both families create Jewish households, generating an increase in the Jewish population as a result of exogamy.
- One of the two families creates a Jewish household, in which case the population balance of households belonging to the Jewish community remains the same.
- Both families create non-Jewish households, the only scenario in which the number of Jewish households falls.

At the same time, the political and institutional agenda regarding the best way to address exogamy within institutions, activities and proposals is being discussed, as well as the question of how and to what extent community resources should be dedicated to the issue. Similar to the division within the academic debate, community leaders and professionals hold two main views:

[5] At the same time, and as a result of the same phenomenon, an increasing number of Jews consider themselves observant or very observant.

- *Outreach*: Based on the acknowledgement that a large number of Jewish families are distanced from community institutions and the view of exogamy as inevitable, as well as the principles of *keruv* ("bringing close" those who have distanced themselves, presenting them with Jewish options) and *ahavat ha-ger* ("loving the stranger")[6]. Outreach involves a multidisciplinary approach considered successful to the extent that the "distanced" choose to participate in certain aspects of Jewish life. The project which best fits this description in Argentina is YOK[7], which offers open classes on a variety of themes, talks and debates, support for shows related to Jewish issues and the development of so-called Public Space Judaism through Urban Rosh Hashanah and Passover events.

- *Inreach*: Based on the American Jewish Committee's statements regarding mixed marriage. Steven Bayme, one of the key figures for this initiative, describes it according to the following three concepts: i) develop an endogamous language, encouraging Jews to marry other Jews; ii) when this does not happen, emphasize conversion as the best possible option; and iii) when conversion is not possible, encourage mixed couples to raise their children as exclusively Jewish[8]. Recognizing these proposals may sound unpopular in the contemporary world, it nevertheless emphasizes the need to support them in order to preserve group distinction: if the boundaries are too flexible, how can we tell who is Jewish and who isn't? If everyone who defines themselves as Jewish is considered Jewish, what does it mean to live a Jewish life? And how is that expressed in everyday life? (Bayme 2002).

Those who support one or another of these positions, participate in, promote and encourage an overall debate on Judaism in the twenty-first century, each with their own explanations as to who is Jewish and the implications of this for Jewish continuity. However, as Phillips indicates, the debate appears to place relatively less importance on how actual couples see themselves (2004). The present study aims to address this, beginning by exploring the certainties and hesitations, continuities and ruptures, comforts and discomforts, agreements and disagreements involved in this issue, interpreting the voices of social actors, attempting to understand the scope of an identity they are constantly constructing and reconstructing.

Exogamy, Social Boundaries and Jewish Identity

The interaction between groups provides sensitive data when it comes to understanding the scope of social boundaries; exogamy (marriage outside of the group) and heterogamy (marriage between people from different socioeconomic groups) not only reveal interactions that reach beyond the group's boundaries, they also show how members of different groups accept each other as equals (Kalmijn 1998).

All "endogamous systems" seek to defend, conserve, or care for the homogeneity of a group—whether it be social, ethnic, religious or national—keeping it uniform "from the inside" and completely distinguishable "from the outside."

While all endogamous systems maintain intra-group unions as the ideal, seeking to preserve group cohesion, in places or social spaces where contact between different

[6] See Dru Greenwood (among others), Speculating on Jewish Futures. Hadassah-Brandeis Institute. April 26, 2004.

[7] The project's website describes it as follows: "YOK invites you to experience Judaism your own way. Free of dogmas and censorship. With the certainty of being Jewish and the questioning typical of any living culture. YOK is openness and emotion. A cultural project that seeks, through intellectual and artistic expression, a continuous reflection on Jewishness. It is the creation of non-traditional spaces for Jewish life. YOK emerged with the aim to contribute to the development of a pluralist community, resignifying Jewish values for society as a whole", at www.yoktime.com. A more extensive description of the Outreach policies can be found at the Jewish Outreach Institute's website, www.joi.org.

[8] For more, see the "American Jewish Committee Statement on Intermarriage," in The Intermarriage Crisis - Jewish Communal Perspectives and Responses, AJC, 1991.

social groups is not only possible but common, the boundaries that divide "inside" from "outside" become highly permeable (Rodriguez Garcia 2004).

According to Kalmijn, marriage patterns are mainly influenced by three social forces: a) individual preferences; b) the role of third parties; and c) the *marriage market* (Kalmijn 1998).

Individual preferences are governed in large part by socioeconomic factors (which generate economic well-being and social status) and cultural factors (the preference to marry someone considered "similar," especially in behaviour and worldview). As anthropologist Alejandro Grimson notes, when we choose, we do so guided by feelings (related to lineage, loyalties and longing) and interests (class, neighbourhood, nation, etc.) (2011).

In evaluating the other (both consciously and largely unconsciously) we tend to ask ourselves certain questions such as: what do I feel for this person? What do they feel for me? Are our feelings "deep" enough to be able to sustain this commitment in the long term? It is at this point that the expectations of those involved come into play, expectations of themselves, of the other and Others, creating a "shared history" (Giddens 1995) which will produce a "we" that can project itself into the future.

Given that exogamy can threaten internal cohesion and group homogeneity, there is an incentive for *third parties* to discourage exogamous couples. This can happen in two ways: a) through the identification with the group and a sense of belonging to a people and b) through group sanctions (by way of family, the state or religious institution). For group sanctions to be carried out and have the desired effect, these groups must be clearly set apart from those around them and have a recognized authority who can apply the sanction. Both attributes are seriously questioned in Western postmodern societies in general and in Judaism in particular.

Lastly, the marriage market refers to the possibility of people of the same group finding each other. These chances increase along with the size of the group and/or the extent of geographic concentration, even if the group is small. The Jewish population of the city of Buenos Aires is a good example of this. They represent a small group within Argentina's overall social structure, although they are highly concentrated within the geographically limited area of the capital city. This does not happen, for example, in the area known as Greater Buenos Aires where the community is more spread out, there are less community organizations to bring them together, the distances to get to those organizations are greater, the roads are less developed, there is less public transportation, etc. This is what Mariano remembers when looking back on his childhood in San Justo: *"It wasn't at all like living in Villa Crespo*[9]*. I mean, you went out to a nightclub and... we were the minority there (...) I was always tied to Judaism by a thread (...) I always had a precarious relationship with Judaism."* With respect to geography, one of the most important factors of the marriage market is the socioeconomic variable; the further Jews are from major centres—in physical, attitudinal or emotional distance—, the lower the possibility they will interact with others in the group. They will also have less in common, affecting *individual preferences*.

In any case, it is worth noting that in both contexts—whether the concentration of Jews and community institutions is higher or lower—there is a tendency for coexistence outside of the group. ORT, one of the Jewish community's main secondary schools, has seen increasing rates of student enrolment among non-Jews. On the other hand, those who graduate from the Jewish secondary school and wish to continue their studies at the university level are attending both public and private institutions, but no longer exclusively Jewish ones. At the same time, coexistence in the professional or work-world also involves broadening social ties.

[9] Villa Crespo is a neighborhood in Buenos Aires with a high number of Jewish families and institutions.

Most Argentine Jews have adapted to the setting around them and the reverse is true as well. The Jewish community is recognized as a part of Argentine society and an essential member of its plural identity. A study carried out by B´NEI B´RITH Argentina in 2006, found that Argentine Jews are an integral part of everyday life, make recognized contributions to society, would be elected to hold senior positions in public office and would be admitted into non-Jewish families and thus form part of a series of groups and communities considered equal in society (Karol and Moiguer 2006).

In his analysis of exogamy in the United States, Barack Fishman argues that Jews marry non-Jews partly due to a growing acceptance of them in the Gentile world, although this is mainly because many non-Jewish families have at least one Jewish member (Barack Fishman 2004). This fact affects the relationship of Jews with the majority around them, given that they are now active participants in determining these relationships (Rein 2012).

Our research in Argentina shows similar results. In many cases, the non-Jewish member forms part of what we call *proximity groups* or segments of people who form close and lasting bonds with individuals who identify as Jewish—whether it be through their parents' professions or their own, the neighbourhood they live or lived in, the schools they attended, their vacation spots or the businesses they frequent, or numerous other possibilities—, incorporating elements of their language, culture, traditions and worldview.

Thus, a couple is formed and the non-Jewish member belongs to one of these *proximity groups*, the meeting is a clear demonstration of the porous nature of ethnic and religious boundaries. When Andrea, a 30-year-old sociologist now fully dedicated to singing, presents her boyfriend (also a musician), she describes him as having no religious observance of any kind, though in the past he shared many significant moments with Jews and has shown an interest in their culture:

> *"He comes from a Catholic family and received communion, but it didn't matter to him that much. He isn't observant of any religion and isn't that interested either. He does feel a certain affinity for Jewish culture though. He has a ton of Jewish friends and he's always admired things—you can also see it in his family. His dad, a businessman, is associated with a lot of people from the Jewish community and has a certain admiration for the culture. I think intellectually he likes to learn new things and he's interested in the history. On a religious level though, he's not a religious person. He does yoga and has a kind of naturalist philosophy."*

Whom one dates and ultimately falls in love with is a function of the social circles in which one moves and how one is evaluated in them (Mayer 1985). When the ties between different social groups begin at a young age, contact with other minority cultures (such as Judaism) is fluid, almost spontaneous, and all initial ethnic and religious differences seem not to be as relevant, revealing its porous nature. Martin mentions this when talking about his wife:

> *"Caro is very familiar with the culture because her best friend from preschool was Jewish and, just by coincidence, her best friend from primary school as well. And at the Buenos Aires [Secondary School], half of the students were Jewish and her group of four or five friends were all Jewish. So from the time she was little, she became used to going to Passover Seders... I think she's gone to shul more than I have because when they were teenagers, the normal outing with her friends was to go to temple on Fridays and then out to eat."*

Similarly, Valentina, 39, with a degree in business administration, comments:

> *"I'm Catholic. I'm a believer but I'm not really into following the rules or going to mass. We didn't go to a Catholic primary school, we went to a secular state school, but it was in the middle of Once[10], I mean all my friends were Jewish, I was always surrounded. Half were Jewish and half were Catholic."*

The way Valentina met her current partner was also influenced by the characteristics of her *marriage market*. They met in Punta del Este, Uruguay, a traditionally upper-middle to upper class beach (a socioeconomic stratum in which Jews are overrepresented compared to the general population). Here we also have an example of the demographic concentration described by Kalmijn. The consequences are clear: a non-Jew living and vacationing in places with a demographically high concentration of Jews, will easily come into contact and interact with them.

> *"I used to go to Punta del Este and always ended up at a beach that was very much a favourite of the Jewish community. I always ended up in those places and didn't even realize it. I didn't even know it was a thing. It was always because someone else was going. There were always people from the community around, men and women, and well, when I met him, I don't remember thinking about him being Jewish."*

For his part, her husband Esteban explains how, despite moving in social circles with a high concentration of Jews, he is quite open to relating to others:

> *"I'm a very open person, unlike many Jews who are completely the opposite. That puts me off a bit. Everything that represents closing oneself off bothers me. (...) I don't like when things are closed off, that's how I am, you see? Maybe that has something to do with why I chose to marry someone from outside of the community, although it wasn't a conscious decision either."*

The data produced by the Estudio de la Población Judía de Buenos Aires (Study of the Jewish Population of Buenos Aires), carried out in 2005 by the Latin American Office of the JDC, confirm these trends: 41% reported relating to similar proportions of Jews and non-Jews and 26% said that their relationships were mostly with non-Jews. 27% interacted mostly with Jews and only 4% reported that their social ties were exclusively with Jews (Jmelnizky and Erdei 2005). As expressed by Hernan, a young engineer who spent his childhood and adolescence in Jewish schools and organizations: *"Whether we have Jewish friends or not is mostly a question of statistics. We don't choose our friends based on whether or not they are Jewish."*

For many Jews, the categories "Jew" and "Gentile" are relativized when interacting when non-Jews. As Alba points out, in these situations, other social identities come into play and the dominant one at the time may be a shared identity, such as professional colleagues, university classmates or even spouses (Alba 2006, 47:347-358). With the decline of the major symbolic systems, Judaism has had to learn to compete in an open market of ideas and contexts, both multiple and parallel, each one offering its own notions of value, meaning and truth (Halbertal and Hartman 2009).

[10] "Once" [Onzay] is a neighborhood in Buenos Aires with a high number of Jewish families and institutions.

In Buenos Aires, approximately 4 out of every 10 marriages are exogamous[11]. This implies a significant change in the way Jewish families and their social context are understood. It not only reveals that a greater proportion of Jews are in relationships with non-Jews, it also takes into account the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends of these couples.

According to Alba and Nee, these boundaries become porous when a middle ground opens up. However, while there is less of a social distance between the groups, which are brought together, individual ethnic backgrounds remain important. As a result, although this distinction exists, it will not be perceived by others (Alba and Nee 2003).

This situation is described by Andrea, who also brings up the initial contradiction of falling in love with someone while believing this could potentially interfere with the continuity of what she sees as her people.

> *The Jewish combo was always a factor. It was one among many. In fact, it continues to be important to me but it's not the only thing. And it's not a decisive factor. I mean, beyond all the activities, I also studied English, danced, I was involved in other activities and I also began to study singing in high school. I had finished English and began to study singing. And... I was always looking to be more open, in every sense of the word. I had gone from my studies to art, jumping straight into things, it was about following my heart. And when it came to choosing a partner, it was about what I felt. And if he was Jewish, fine, and if not, it was also fine. But the burden of, let's say, the chain of continuity, was tough. It made me feel like, damn, I'm the broken link in the chain... like a threat to the continuity of my people."*

Part of this phenomenon can be seen in Table 1: while 46% of the Jewish population of Buenos Aires state that it is important or very important their partner be Jewish and 41% feel it is of little or no importance, the vast majority, 68%, believes that one can marry a non-Jew without this necessarily resulting in a loss of identity.

Statement	Agree / Strongly agree	Neither Agree, nor disagree	Disagree / Strongly disagree	Don't know/ No response	Total
It is really important to me that my partner be Jewish	46%	10%	41%	3%	100%
Marrying a non-Jew does not necessarily mean a loss of identity	68%	8%	18%	6%	100%

Table 1. How much do you agree with the following statements?

What Does it Mean to be Jewish?

The question of what it means to be Jewish is often an uncomfortable one. In many cases, its complexity is even reflected in respondents' gestures as they raise their eyebrows, bite their lips, bring their hands to their mouths or simply shift their posture. The issue is an uncomfortable one because we have a tendency to ask ourselves where we are and

[11] There is a debate among specialists as to the most appropriate way to measure exogamy. The first question is whether the calculation should be based on the individual or the couple. For instance, if we take 3 Jews and 2 marry each other and the other marries a non-Jew, the individual calculation would be that 1 out of 3 Jews or 33% are in mixed marriages. If, however, we take the couple as a reference point (2 couples), then the result would that be 1 out of every 2 couples or 50% are mixed. Another important factor is establishing whether the calculation is based on all the possible partners or only the young partners that have formed in recent years. The Study of the Jewish Population bases the calculation on couples of all ages. For a more detailed description, see (Della Pergola 2009:13-40).

where we want to be, but not who we are: what does it mean to be a father? What does it mean to be Argentine? And what defines me as Jewish?

It is also uncomfortable because it splits, separates and divides identities into clearly distinguished groups. The question is not about the complex network of feelings and sense of belonging we call "identification" but rather the (no less complex) question of "identification with Judaism."

It is especially uncomfortable because when taken by surprise, participants can only reply spontaneously. It is through this spontaneity that the depth of these narratives are revealed. The unique way in which each person chooses to present themselves and the more or less unpredictable milestones that emerge to convert these separate photos into a "road movie" that, in the end, allows them to communicate what it is to be Jewish, what it meant in the past, how each got to where they are and what questions are still unresolved.

Among its most salient characteristics, the postmodern present reveals the impossibility for a group to define its own biographical script to serve as an essential reference for its members. For this reason, sociologist Alberto Melucci claims that narrating is one way of responding to the challenges of identity in the postmodern era, where narrating means "to confine without closing (...) to fill a void, while leaving open the space of the imaginary." He argues that through narrative, boundaries can be both established and overcome. Narrative also configures spaces of continuity and discontinuity, ways of relating to the past and imagining the future (Melucci 2001).

In many cases, faced with the impossibility of separating out different identities, and thus the impossibility of referring to an exclusively Jewish identity, the narratives focused on the requested Jewish bias, though with the essential inclusion of other identities.

The definition that the Jewish members of exogamous couples give of "being Jewish" is not that different from what any other Jew might answer, whether single, divorced or in an endogamous relationship. This identification can include narratives that refer to culture, religion, ties to Israel, the Holocaust, the Diaspora, traditions, holidays, family gatherings, music and food, among others.

However, the exogamous group exhibits some distinctive features with respect to the whole group—mostly shared by so-called "non-affiliated." There are few cases in exogamous relationships in which religion plays a key role and many which are more focused on secular or cultural and traditionalist issues. On the other hand, the narratives of this group placed greater emphasis on political and ideological identities, both with respect to themselves and the role Judaism plays in their lives.

Andrea eloquently recounts her inability to verbally express what she feels. She tries to ask the same question about other identities and comes to the same conclusion: she finds it hard to think of herself in hermetically separated compartments of independent elements that together make up her identity when, in reality, they are all juxtaposed, creating a framework which, though difficult to define, is present, recognized, valued, discussed and reinvented.

> *"For them [her parents], the priority was a Jewish education, a Jewish family (...). And for me, it's just one element of many. It's like asking how you are a woman... it's just something that I am. It's difficult, it's hard now to pinpoint a specific place, something concrete and say 'okay, this is my Jewish streak'. I couldn't do it... I feel that it's something that is just a part of me. The community I grew up in, maybe everything that represents my connection to the Jewish community or... even to spirituality, (...) to a certain extent to a Jewish identity. To the topic of asking oneself, questioning why we're here, trying to make sense of things. Even the impulse to interpret everything is very Jewish."*

This multiple identification distances her from the most entrenched views of "identity", from those that argue there are clear differences in what it means to belong to a group, from those that see identity as an issue that trumps all others, from those for whom membership is only made possible by exclusion. These views that consider geographical and social isolation as critical factors in conserving cultural diversity have been addressed by, among others, the anthropologist Fredrik Barth in his well-known prologue to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Barth 1976). When the boundary is so pronounced that it excludes, Andrea feels she ends up in the middle:

> *"In my opinion, it makes sense to do what you feel you have to. And maybe there are many practices that are more tied to doing something simply because you're supposed to, rather than doing something because you feel it. (...) It's like the more exclusive an identity is, the stronger the boundary between it and the outside, and for them [Chabad], Pedro is on the outside. So that leaves me in the 'in between' [she laughs]."*

For Lucas, it's essential, when discussing his identity, to begin with his relatives escaping from the concentration camps. For most, if not all, it is impossible to think about Jewish identity in the present without thinking about the horrors of the Holocaust, given the consequences it had and has for the Jewish community in particular and humanity in general. When asked what being Jewish in Argentina means to him, he replied:

> *"Cultural baggage. I have a lot of relatives originally from Europe, Eastern Europe. I have relatives who died in the camps, not immediate relatives, but great-uncles. My grandparents escaped from Austria. My mother's father escaped from Austria in '38. He escaped by a hair. They put him in a train and he managed to get away (...) my great-grandparents died in the camps there. So I think my Jewish cultural baggage comes by way of my family history and that's how I identify. Beyond my Bar Mitzvah, for instance, or the Sholem [day school]."*

These identities are traversed by the general contexts of Jewish life, by what happens in the home. Perhaps one of the most complex cases is that of Sabrina, a 40-year-old teacher, whose Jewish parents were both members of a leftist party during the period of military dictatorship (1976-1983). Her memories are focused on her relatives, who were 'disappeared' by the military, and how her community represented a space of safety and security, a space where she was able to find herself, talk and play like any other child, despite threats from the outside. Sabrina's recollections are of the ICUF (Federation of Jewish Cultural Institutions of Argentina), which provided a safe space that allowed her to grow and learn like other children.

> *"My whole childhood was during the dictatorship. I was in the first grade in '76 and finished sixth grade in '83, from beginning to end. There were several deaths and 'disappeared' in my family and somehow I think that was related to a return to the community in some cases, or new ties with the aspect of community that had maybe been lost. I went to kindergarten in the ICUF and it was space that provided a degree of security within the chaos. My parents are deeply atheist and we were brought up with a very strong atheism and I consider myself very Jewish but not at all in a religious sense. During the dictatorship there were several important figures within the community, for example, my dad adored Herman Schiller."*

On the other hand, in most interviews, Judaism appears from a cultural standpoint—not necessarily a religious one—, given an existential, intellectual and philosophical take on life, with respect to the interest, curiosity and knowledge of one's own historical past, traditions, culture, tastes and smells. The recognition of one's own family history and experiences and the desire to share this emotion and pass it on to future generations is the

ultimate expression of a secular and traditionalist Judaism. Sorj points out that Judaism, like any other cultural identity, is a encounter between destiny and choice. The choice to be Jewish and the decision of how, of being born Jewish and choosing to continue to be, of being Jewish and wanting one's children to be, and also of having not been born Jewish but being prepared to share a life with Jews and have Jewish children (Sorj 2009). Patricia, a 43-year-old teacher whose children currently attend the Sarmiento-Sholem school (a school belonging to the ICUF movement), comments the following:

> *"I say that I'm Jewish. But for me being Jewish isn't going to a synagogue or praying or even believing in God. I'm Jewish because I was born into a Jewish home, because I believe in the inheritance of a Jewish culture that I'm passing on to my children (...), and I don't know if it has an explanation. That's why I think many people don't understand, because it's clearly a feeling, it's something you carry inside you. I don't know, it's something deep inside that can't really be explained."*

In a similar way, Roberto manages to identify how his Judaism is present in his everyday life, as a teacher, in the approach he takes with his students. When asked what he considers Jewish about his daily life, Roberto answers:

> *"My way of approaching different topics. If I'm giving classes, it's in how I frame things, (...) it's looking for new interpretations of what's already been interpreted."*

It should be noted that the predominance of a cultural Judaism within the exogamous universe does not negate the continuity of certain milestones originally religious in nature, though largely reincorporated by these sectors as part of their ethnic and cultural identity (Barack Fishman 2004; Erdei 2011:41-51; Mayer 1985; Porzecanski 2006; Sorj 2009). In fact, as an example in which both cultural and religious ties play a role, in Buenos Aires, of those who consider themselves either non-observant or somewhat observant, 63% have participated in some way in the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), mainly through family dinners, with or without religious content, and have occasionally gone to synagogue (Erdei 2011:341-363). Along the same lines, the majority of those who have their sons circumcised or a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, generally do so as a way of affirming tradition, and not due to belief in a divine commandment (Sorj 2009).

Roberto does not consider himself observant nor does he believe that religion plays a significant role in his identity. However (supporting the hypotheses suggested above) he states: "*I don't practice rituals except for those connected with bringing the family together. Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the ones that are related to getting together.*"

In a minority of cases, religion appears as the main factor when identifying with Judaism. When this happens, there is a clear contradiction between personal choices and community responsibility, between the call for endogamy and the urge to follow their hearts. This contradiction remains to a certain extent unresolved, in that any move by the non-Jewish partner other than a conversion accepted by the Jewish partner (which would, in effect, nullify the exogamous nature of the relationship), would result in a feeling of incompleteness, even resignation. Jacobo, a 73-year-old businessman from Cordoba, describes the place religion has for him as a form of spirituality but also in the observance of the Jewish precepts of attending synagogue and reading the *Torah*. At the same time, his statements reveal the complex relationship between his community and his wife.

> *"Now I always go to Temple. I observe all the holidays. The only thing I don't do is to keep kosher. But I have a friend here who is kosher and almost 100% of the time I spend with him, I keep kosher. I can't go astray. So I do fulfil some things, a pleasure. But I know that there's no way I'll give in. (...) For me, parading the Torah around is the best there*

is... what can I say, it's the most meaningful thing there is for a Jew. Because it lets you remember all those who have passed away, all the events. I mean, you can let a lot of things go that way, just by parading the Torah around."

In Jacobo's case, as in many others, "parading the Torah" does not represent an individual act isolated from the context in which it takes place. Jacobo's narrative becomes meaningful when "parading the Torah" takes place within the context of his community, an Orthodox community in which he is prevented from doing so because of his choice of partner. At a certain point in the interview, he mentions that many of his friends and even his psychologist have recommended he go to another temple that will allow a greater coexistence between what currently appear to be two well-differentiated worlds. This suggestion, which may sound logical from a common sense point of view, makes no sense for Jacobo:

"I go to an Orthodox temple, the Chabad... Obviously because I'm not in a relationship with a Jewish girl, I'm not allowed to parade the Torah around. They don't let me do anything. (...) Once I went to a psychologist and explained the situation to her and told her how difficult it was for me. That for me, parading the Torah around is really significant. So she asks me why I'm punishing myself like this when I can simply go to another temple where they'll let me do it. It's true. I could go to other temples where they're not so fanatical and will let me parade the Torah around. But I said to her, 'you know, the thing is, I'm at home in my temple. Everyone knows me and the only thing I'm missing is a sense of fulfilment'."

Given all that Judaism and religion mean for Jacobo, his partner has made every effort to adapt, learn, integrate, study and form part of the community. Over the years, she did this not as a concession to her partner but for herself. But in not accepting conversion, the sense of something lacking persists:

"She adapted. She knows our traditions, our religion. She knows more than anyone. Sometimes it's not a question of being, but of showing. How many Jewish people are there who have no idea what is being celebrated at each holiday, all the details? She knows all about the holidays, what is eaten at each holiday. She knows more than any of us. The only thing missing is for her to be Jewish..."

Significant Life Experiences and their Place in Jewish Identity

It is quite common to refer to the absence of "community contact" as one of the main causes of someone choosing a non-Jewish partner. The argument, with good reason, is that the rates of exogamy are lower when there is intense participation in the Jewish community than in other cases in which Jewish institutions have played a minor role.

Add to this, the "intensity" at which each family experiences and communicates their Judaism in everyday life. It is also true that in homes where Judaism is more present on a daily basis, the likelihood that the children of these families will have exogamous relationships is lower.

Nevertheless, the proportion of exogamous couples is increasing, even among individuals who have extensive community ties and lead an "intensely" Jewish life. To this end, it is important to return to the discussion on how avoidable or unavoidable exogamy is.

If exogamy is viewed as an avoidable process, this implies that the Jewish community could develop a "plan of action" that would control, or at least influence, the desire to choose Jewish partners. The goal would be to see the percentages of exogamy fall over time.

On the other hand, if exogamy is understood as an inevitable process given the context in which most Jews live (certainly those of Buenos Aires), the distinction between these sub-groups (endogamous vs. exogamous) is more descriptive than functional. In this case, the objective would not be to reduce exogamy, but rather to increase Jewish experiences within these homes.

In order to develop the latter, we have identified five attitudinal profiles of Jewish members of mixed couples: continuers, disrupters, approachers, tangentials and those who come from Catholicism.

Continuers cite moments in their personal biographies related to Jewish life that are important to them when presenting themselves to others and talking about who they are, how they think and what their expectations are, both in general and as Jews.

"Continuers" present rereadings of the past in which Jewish experiences (of any type) are part of a transcendent history that extends into the present and plays into their identity, not because of their Jewishness *per se*, but because they are meaningful in terms of both individual and family constructs. It is this type of emotional memory that is reflected in a survey of the Jewish population of Buenos Aires when, on being asked what makes respondents feel Jewish, they mostly mentioned "celebrating holidays as a family" (76%), "eating typical Jewish foods" (66%) or "relatives recounting memories of their Jewish past" (61%) (Jmelnizky and Erdei 2005:73). Ultimately, what stands out are the memories of shared moments and significant life experiences, both at the level of family and community organizations. This is how Juan, a 30-year-old agricultural engineer, tells his story, beginning directly with what he looks back on as emotional memories:

> *"A very Jewish education as far as... more with respect to my father than my mother. I mean, with respect to the environment around us. Even so, we didn't keep kosher and we didn't do Shabbat every Friday. But it was really important. My father is really dedicated to instilling Judaism (...). All the stories he told us when we were young were related to Judaism. Every Seder, everything related to holidays or commemorations, and it was about more than how to observe the holiday, the food, I mean, with explanations, the meaning behind them, the interpretations (...). But I found it really interesting. I was interested in Jewish history, in reading Hebrew well. At the time of my Bar Mitzvah, I remember that I wanted them to give me a lot to read. That was just how I was. I went to the various camps that were held by Bet El, Majane Ramah."*

Mariana, a 43-year-old psychologist married to Enrique (also a psychologist), reflects on her participation in community institutions and the importance of the everyday content and values that she and her husband both hope to pass on to their children. From her participation in community organizations, she cites having gained a concern for others, community values and friendships formed through different groups and camps. These are all things that she sees as having had a lasting impact on who she is or, as she puts it, her identity.

> *"There are values I'm interested in preserving, that were passed on to me and that I'd like to pass on to my children (...) community values. I mean, growing up in groups taught me respect for social ties, the bonds of friendship and that kind of thing, at our club, camps, having been brought up with a group of children, the values of friendship (...) that make a person who they are. That create an identity, not just a Jewish identity, an identity."*

These values experienced in the past but which are nevertheless relevant to the present allow a greater understanding of what is being preserved and potentially passed on.

While these experiences often took place within Jewish community institutions and organizations, it is not the institution nor the time spent there that determines the relevance of these values in the present but rather the fact that they led to significant life experiences. This concept is powerful since it suggests that these experiences can take place not only within the framework of formal Jewish organizations, but also in other contexts that reach out to either Jews or non-Jews, including virtually, through social networking sites and blogs among others.

Disrupters construct their personal biographies and include aspects of identity that are related Jewish life (in their families, in institutions, among friends), though they give them little importance in their present lives. The disruption may be due to rejection or indifference.

- The former involves an explicit rejection of Jewish community life (for instance, by branding it as elitist or a space they do not want their children to participate in).
- On the other hand, indifferent-disrupters distance themselves from community life in a less evident, even less conscious, though equally effective way. They do not cite a causal relationship for this (as rejecter-disrupters do). They talk about this separation as a quiet process they attempt to attribute to a variety of factors (the choice of a partner or school for their children, a move to an area with a lower density Jewish population, the death of a relative who encouraged Jewish content, etc.).

Natalia, 37, has "two children, two dogs and two cats", and lives with her partner. Her narrative clearly shows how the story she constructs about her relationship to what she considers Judaism is a story of a growing separation, a story in which her education as a child made her feel the odd one out and how this led to a search that ultimately ended up distancing her from Judaism:

> *"I don't have very fond memories of my experiences in community institutions and organizations. It's true that it wasn't so bad for me because I managed to understand the social codes, but what I do remember? I used to go to the groups. Sometimes I liked them, sometimes I didn't. There was a big difference between those who were in the bungalows and those who weren't, like me, because we used to go to the tables for people without bungalows. I used to go there alone on the bus on Saturdays and come home on Sundays in the car with them (...). There was a social distance between us and I felt it back then. It was clear when it came to choosing sports or a friend, it was very segregated between those who had bungalows and those who didn't. Or maybe I was very sensitive, that's also possible. I was always very sensitive about that type of thing, differences, distances. There were objective differences there, but it could also be that I was more sensitive to those things."*

As a teenager, when she completed the leadership course and the group was organizing their trip to Israel, these distances became critical. Planning a trip to Israel at a very difficult and unstable moment for the country (the premature end of the first democratic government following years of military dictatorship, in the midst of a significant economic crisis, hyperinflation and high unemployment rates), for the world (the fall of the Berlin wall) and for her and her family, represented a breaking point, a limitation as to what she was willing to do in order to continue on as a *madricha*[12] [youth counsellor]:

> *"I distanced myself from Jewish community institutions for the first time. I took the [Jewish Community Center] Macabi leadership course and I had a really good chance*

[12] The impact of socioeconomics on Jewish community life has been documented by Daniel Bargman in one of the few qualitative works on exagamous couples in the Argentine Jewish community. For more details, see (Bargman 1991).

at being a madricha in Macabi, but when the trip to Israel came up, it was '89 or '88 and with the hyperinflation at the time, my parents were really struggling and I wasn't interested in going to Israel, I didn't feel like going. And it seemed to me that the people living in Macabi were inside a kind of economic bubble. People were starving and it was going to take a ton of money to go to Israel. I didn't want to put that burden on my parents. The trip wasn't so important to me and so I left before it."

Reflecting on this, she notes that in reality it wasn't only the socioeconomic issue that set her apart from her friends and other members of the group, but that certain conflicts of interest had begun to appear.

"I had an interest in politics that I didn't see in the others (...) In politics, in the student centre, in going to the Plaza de Mayo. I don't remember them being very concerned about these things. They were more interested in other things, in material culture, brand name jeans. It's not that that bothered me, but there were things that... I think the Jewish leftist groups would have been much more in line with my thinking, perhaps I would have identified more with them. I met people, but never ended up going. Later I met people, you make connections, and they were more my type. They didn't have that materialist element that you find in the Jewish community, in much of the community, that doesn't really work for me."

Acknowledging this (economic though mainly ideological) distance from her "former world," she began to spend more time in other places where she was more comfortable and secure, settings in which it was easier to find people who shared her views on things. While going through this transition, she met her current husband, a member of the group H.I.J.O.S (Children for Identity and Justice and against Forgetting and Silence).

Approachers are mostly children of exogamous marriages, that have then gone on to form similar unions. They are "approachers" for two main reasons:

From a young age, they feel a certain connection to their Jewish roots and have attempted, in different ways, to move closer to and form part of the Jewish community. In some cases, they participate in community organizations.

Through milestones: they define their ties to the Jewish community as "before" and "after" one or more milestones identified as a turning point. Prior to these milestones, their Jewish identity could be described as marginal; afterwards it becomes a significant aspect of how they present or identify themselves.

Maria's father is Catholic and her mother, Jewish. During her childhood, she tended to go more often to church than synagogue. Nevertheless, she claims to have always felt Jewish. The question of belonging was something that motivated her and she decided to talk about it with her brother, who confessed to feeling the same way.

Following this, she began to explore and more and more questions until she came to the conclusion that *"it's something I'd absorbed without trying to, it was just in the air. My mother hadn't intended to give me something Jewish, but she ended up doing it anyway. She cooked a lot and Jewish cooking was part of my home, it was what she'd learned from her mother and what her grandmother had learned."*

It was during this process that she began to look for spaces where she could expand on and further explore what she had been feeling, a place she could feel a part of. She wanted *"to find a space where I could approach Judaism and understand why I feel Jewish, a space that would be open to consideration of all kinds of issues."*

Finding a space which allows her to participate in Judaism, as might be expected, has not meant turning her back on her Catholic background, nor has it meant distancing herself from her father or his side of the family. The decision to explore her Judaism has by no means taken away from her active enjoyment of the celebrations on her father's side of the family:

> *"it never occurred to me to not participate in Catholic celebrations with my father's side of the family. I know that part of my identity is that I am the daughter of a mixed marriage. My father is Catholic and Christmas also has a special significance for me."*

Tangentials are generally the children of exogamous marriages. They have not had significant life experiences in relation to their Judaism, nor do they feel there are elements that currently identify them as Jews. The majority do not identify ethnically or religiously with other communities. They do not define themselves as Jews, but they do not see themselves as Catholic either, for instance.

Sebastian, 22, begins the interview by describing his position*: "my father is Jewish and he told me that when I grow up, I'll decide what I want to do. I wasn't even circumcised (...) My mother is Catholic, but she's not a believer".* He participates in celebrations on both sides of the family, accompanying and enjoying the gatherings, but without feeling particularly inspired.

When it comes to his current situation, he explains: *"I'm neither Jewish nor Catholic. You can't make either of those labels stick."* He finds it easier to explain his personality by citing his "Italian-American" background, especially in relation to his impulsive nature, *"doing things and not thinking about the consequences. I don't see that much Jewishness in me. I got more from my Italian background."*

From Catholicism: In this case, the significant life experiences that have had the greatest impact are related to another religion, generally Catholicism.

Mara is an only child. Although her parents tried not to decide things for her, at 12 she made up her mind that she wanted to be baptized, take communion and be confirmed, "which are the three most important sacraments in Catholicism." According to her, despite having received no explicit instruction from her parents, her decision seemed (and still seems) natural, given that "*from the time I was little, I used to kneel down and say my prayers before bed. I was already a believer from a very young age.*"

She imagines that her (Catholic) mother must have had some degree of influence on her later decision in having taught her prayers and spoken to her about religion, explaining "*I felt that it was a balanced approach, but maybe one of my parents was more involved in passing religion on to me."*

She went to ORT secondary school and currently most of her close friends are Jewish. Being in this Jewish environment, she says, has distanced her a little from the activities she used to participate in that were tied to Catholicism but she has not abandoned her beliefs, "I often go to mass, almost every Sunday."

According to her, it was initially difficult for her father to accept her choice. He was not surprised, but "I'm sure it affected him", although trying to respect his daughter's decision, he did his best not to let his feelings get in the way.

Like any categorization, the objective is descriptive and is not intended to be exhaustive. Within this description, potential mobility should also be considered, the possibility that a "disrupter" become an "approacher," or a "continuer" turn into a "disrupter," along with the

other potential combinations, just as a "continuer" of another religion could, at some point in life, find themselves moving towards Judaism.

These profiles allow us to gain a better understanding of the complexity involved when a Jew ends up falling in love with a non-Jew. They add a degree of complexity to the analysis by acknowledging the personal histories involved, moving beyond the marriage or union itself, to look at what is or is not important in contemplating one's self, one's partner and one's family. Historicizing this analysis allows us to better observe the extent to which an exogamous union may represent a detachment from origins. Based on the narratives of different experiences, we observe that the determining factor in forming a Jewish family is not, as some tend to believe, the exogamous union in itself, but rather degrees of detachment and disidentification which predate the couple. The question of whether an exogamous union will result in one less Jewish family or in the opposite, is tied to the self-perception and self-definition of the Jewish member of the couple with respect to Judaism (Mayer 1985).

This hypothesis allows us to move away from the stigma of exogamy and focus instead on the question of Jewish survival, not simply the marriage or union of some of its members, but rather the values and content that makes being Jewish a meaningful and thus desirable experience, with a potential for future continuity. Insofar as the various narratives identify significant life experiences[13] related to Jewishness (mainly, though not exclusively, during early education and adolescence), we can also get a clearer picture of the need to share this with one's partner and pass it on to one's children.

The Jewish Community as Currently Viewed by Exogamous Couples

Just as ideas regarding identity, assimilation and exogamy have progressed and become more flexible, along with their corresponding societies, the majority of Jewish institutions in Argentina are at a historic crossroads. Progress has been made in recognizing that excommunication is no longer an option (and much less an effective one) and there is a willingness to discuss ways of opening up to a new reality, one with a high percentage of exogamous couples.

The view that most exogamous couples have of community institutions is not that different from vast sectors of the Jewish population in general, particularly those referred to as "non-affiliated". Beyond whether they decide to participate or not and to what extent, they recognize that there are spaces that offer them a variety of options and greater openness.

This new reality establishes a bridge between Jews in exogamous relationships and community organizations. In many cases, this is not only well received, but it also acts as a facilitator for couples who wish to form Jewish households. Goldscheider draws a difference between the current context and that of the 1970s when, despite low rates of exogamous marriages, the consequences had a greater impact on the Jewish community given that some of those who opted for exogamy, did so in repudiation of their community, culture and religion, with all that that implied. At the same time, the communities rejected these couples, considering them a threat. He points out that currently, it is difficult to find a household that has not experienced the effects of exogamy, whether it be within the family or among friends and acquaintances (Goldscheider 2003, 2:18-24).

Mariana spent her whole childhood in the south of Greater Buenos Aires. There, she

[13] I owe this concept to a personal exchange with the Director of Community Development of the Joint Latin America, Diego Freedman.

connected with the various community options available to her and experienced their various transformations. In addition to those related to mergers and name changes, Mariana makes particular note of an ideological change in the attitude towards exogamous families, not only at the institutional level, but also in the participating families themselves.

> *"When I was little, at some point the Jewish community went to the Zionist DAIA which was what Bet-Am was, which is now Brit-Ajim... and the goym [gentiles] were excluded. It was terrible because the goym weren't allowed in the club. Nowadays, mixed marriages aren't excluded, in fact they want to include them. When I went one time to the Macabeadas in Gesell with the volleyball veterans and they wanted to include my husband, (...) I said: wow! In the past they would have excommunicated me. I mean, there was a time when Jews who were with goys were excluded from their families and the community! Now they don't want to throw them out. That's the difference 20 or 30 years can make."*

Mariana sees this process, and many others she mentions, as a different historical moment, part of a paradigm shift, something that has affected almost every community space and which is also echoed by other voices:

> *"My friends, who are mixed too, also go to [Jewish Sport Center] Hacoaj, so I imagine that they're everywhere. This whole thing about youth, we're a part of it. Well, we're not so young, but things have opened up. I'd say we're at another moment, historically speaking."*

In this new context open to new possibilities, Mariana and her family have found a comfortable and empathetic space within the Jewish community. It not only reflects the community values that are important to them, but also offers them a social circle that identifies with Jewish secular values and a leftist political orientation[14]. Her husband Enrique adds:

"Our children go to Sarmiento, which belongs to the Sholem and we're members of the Sholem, and we have a great group of friends (...). Basically because it's a good secondary school, in my opinion, because I have references and it's a great, educationally sound institution (...). We were looking for a place like that because if there is something I value, it's community spirit, which they don't have at some other places (...). It's a question of history, that we could spend a long time discussing, of how Jews try to live as a community. (...) I find it interesting as a group of reference, a cultural group. It's great. You meet people with more or less similar cultural interests... I find that really good, especially for my children."

Roberto, who was born in Quilmes but grew up in the city of Buenos Aires, expresses something similar when he recalls how he went from feeling that his community was rejecting him to feeling invited. He went from being accused of *not being* to being invited *for being*.

> *"Suddenly they were including me as a member of the community. I think the community changed in that sense. No one is excommunicated anymore, like Spinoza, for marrying a goy."*

While from a historical perspective the current context is seen as more open, often Jewish institutions are criticized for a certain degree of materialistic socialization, with conversation centring on superficial topics, establishing a distance with other ways of seeing the world. Juan, who, as we saw above, has been extensively involved in the

[14] On its web page, Sholem-Sarmiento defines itself as: "a progressive, secular and humanist Argentine Jewish organization that keeps the values of Jewish culture and its popular traditions alive. Our objective is to offer broad and attractive proposals to the Jewish community and any good person who finds a sense of belonging with us and helps us promote our humanist and social values in a transformative and creative way, preserving the transmission and continuity of Jewish history, culture, traditions and ideological principles. For more, see http://www.scholem.org.ar/sitionuevo/index.php.

community, points out:

> *"The people I'm around (...) there's a lot of fuss about money, a lot of preppies thinking... spending hours every day thinking about completely banal things, completely banal. I've experienced this and I've also been involved in it, some of them are my friends (...) I mean... they think a lot about the clothes they wear, about whether so-and-so has more money, less money."*

On the other hand, community institutions are often described as organizations requiring participation, commitment, regular attendance and a membership that occasionally does not coincide with the disconnected inclinations characteristic of second modernity or postmodernism. They conceive of themselves and their commitments within a participatory framework in which commitment, permanence and the long-term may be options but not conditions for participating, an unstructured and informal logic of entering and leaving the group with small associations forming according to interests (Waxman 2008:173-178). Alejandro expresses this clearly when, while recognizing "*the shul* was my home" and that in Jewish institutions everything depends on "sharing something", he explains that he is currently looking for a place "*where I don't have to participate, go to the pool and so on. If I want to go, I go. If not, I don't. A Jewish organization comes with a commitment.*" With reference to secular Jews (the majority in this group), Sorj indicates that the practices and institutions associated with Judaism are no longer a constant presence in everyday life and now depend more on contexts, specific situations, circumstances and moods (Sorj 2009).

Estela emigrated from her native city of Comodoro Rivadavia to the "Big City" (Buenos Aires) to seek professional training and personal enrichment. Within this process, she recounts her distancing from Jewish institutions as a way of participating in other spaces in a more relaxed way: *"Everything requires a commitment. The commitment to the organization, the commitment of being a part of something, the commitment of always being asked for something. You go and there's a kind of understanding that 'well, if you like you can start coming every week' or 'we need volunteers'. And that's not what you want. I think that's why a lot of people take distance, because we have other interests in terms of personal development."*

The city of Buenos Aires is characterized by an impressive array of options in terms of institutions and organizations, where many Jewish families find a sense of security, recreational spaces, educational content and a way of socializing with people who have similar interests. Despite this, participation in community organizations (overall and for each group) is around 44% in the city of Buenos Aires and 32% in Greater Buenos Aires (where, as we have observed, the relationship between distance, economic resources and available options is poor[15]). According to the data from a study organized by the Jewish community of Córdoba, participation there reached 52% of area Jewish families[16].

Using this data as a reference point, we can conclude that at the general level, there is a portion of the Jewish population reflected in these institutions and another (the majority) that is distanced from the community. The prevalence of individuals outside of Jewish institutions has led historians, such as Raanan Rein, to suggest that studies of Jews should consider including non-affiliated groups (Rein 2011).

Finding spaces that coincide with the logic described by Sorj is a difficult task. With respect to this, Sabrina points out that

[15] Study of the Jewish Population of Buenos Aires, data compiled by author.

[16] Survey of Jewish Homes. Centro Unión Israelita, Cordoba City, (2005).

"it is very hard to find spaces where we feel comfortable on both sides, complicated, but I imagine there must be something. I have no idea where. Maybe that's why I live in [in the neighbourhood of] Almagro, in a more heterogeneous place. It's about adapting". Santiago expresses a similar opinion, stating *"the organizations I'm familiar with are from when I was more active in the community, from my adolescence and my friends who still go to some of these places. And well, it's a complicated issue because there are... there are some very closed groups, including the topics they discuss (...). But my daughters are not part of this because my family is not like this (...). When I'm around Jews and a kind of Jewish atmosphere emerges, I realize that my family doesn't fit in there."*

On the other hand, there are numerous cases of exogamous couples who have chosen to participate in a particular institution, send their children to a Jewish school or lead an active Jewish life, with all that that implies (although considerably less than endogamous couples). In these cases we can observe common patterns of behaviour, consistent with general cycles in Jewish institutions. They are expressed through stories like that of Raul, who describes how he took distance at the post-secondary level and then returned once he had a family: "*Jewish education from 0 to 7, the first seven years, Tel Aviv. The first three years of secondary school I went to Amos, which is a [Jewish Community Center] Hebraica secondary school. And then (...) I went to Roca and that was it. After that, I left Macabi until I married and had children*." Beyond this cycle, whether he was going or not and with whom, Raul relates this with the emotions and experiences that, in his words, represent much of how he defines his identity: "*it's a question I ask myself. I like the romantic idea of knowing that my seed was planted here. I accept it as history and I find it fascinating, and I like stories (...), because of the bonds that still exist, because of what they left me, because of where I come from. My friends are still from there.*"

In some cases, this time spent in Jewish institutions is a source of conflict. In general, these are moments related to the "Jewish cycle of life" (circumcision, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, wedding, funeral) and there is tension in defining them. While the community in general, and the synagogues and rabbis in particular, see these milestones as religious rites of passage, these families that are mostly secular and traditionalist, appropriate the milestones as a way of endorsing a tradition and celebrating the decision to form a Jewish family (beyond the fact the one of the members is not).

From this position, Andres describes a kind of double standard, mainly among the conservative sector:

"In conservative Jewish communities, the only Jew is the rabbi because he's the only one who meets all of the requirements. The rest kind of do whatever they want. Which is fine... but then they have really closed-minded positions on other things and they protect themselves with rules that they don't even follow. That rubs me the wrong way."

Andrea, on the other hand, spends a great deal of the interview describing her search for a rabbi who will agree to marry her and her non-Jewish partner. In addition to finding someone willing to do this, they are also looking for someone empathetic who can identify with them to a certain extent.

"We began to contact people to see who would bless a mixed marriage. Then we found out that the chuppah is only for converts and conversion isn't really my thing... but well, we kept looking for someone. We went to Mishkan, a reform community, the only one there is here... we had an interview with the Rabbi and then we went to see a wedding. I didn't really like it. I mean, I didn't like it because I wasn't really moved by what they said and I had nothing in common with the person. And the ceremony was pretty similar. It

was a marriage, but without the chuppah... without the ketubah. I mean, without that, without the real ceremony."

But in searching for her Jewish wedding, something that is meaningful to her, her partner and their families, she acknowledges that there are certain elements of a traditional ceremony that may not be included. But this does not seem to concern her as much as finding a way to have a meaningful ceremony.

INT: And would you like these things to be included? The *chuppah*, the *ketubah*...

A: "No, personally they don't mean that much to me. I mean, I'm celebrating my love for Pedro, not my marriage to Judaism. So these things are not that meaningful on a personal level."

It should be noted however, that in most cases this conflict is either less pronounced or simply nonexistent. On the one hand, this is due to the growing phenomenon of cohabitation or common law unions where couples choose to live together and even have children without getting married, by church, synagogue or the state. On the other hand, when couples choose marriage, they often go without a formal religious presence (whether it be a rabbi or a priest) and opt instead for a civil ceremony. Not surprisingly, these tendencies are more common among younger couples than older ones. When Marcos and Luciana decided to get married, neither the church nor the synagogue were real options for them:

"When it came to getting married, I had no intention of getting married in a church because I don't subscribe to the religion and Luciana wasn't going to get married in a synagogue."

Even in cases where couples sought to imbue the ceremony with a sense of belonging, this was mostly self-generated, playful, with clearly personalized content, an emotional and meaningful moment for themselves. This is what happened to Nicolas, when organizing an ad hoc secular Jewish wedding for a friend and incorporating both traditional Jewish elements and content they had prepared themselves:

"A very... non-Jewish Jewish ceremony. An acquaintance of ours who had studied to be a rabbi helped us, he lent us the chuppah. And we put it together ourselves. It was a mix of something moderately formal, let's say, but with many things we wrote ourselves. And it ended up being really moving, with people crying..."

Given the predominantly secular and traditionalist nature of the exogamous couples in Argentina, along with the aforementioned tendency of cohabitation and common law unions, the number of cases in which couples choose to have a religious presence at their weddings is minimal. Nevertheless, when this does happen, there tends to be resistance from both the Catholic and the Jewish sides. In the case that couples wish to combine a Jewish religious ceremony with a Christian one, there are few institutional options and few options legitimized by the community[17].

When it is the Catholic partner who identifies more closely with their origins, as often happens, the family's Catholic bias begins in the early days of the relationship, when the relationship is being tested, and is reinforced through marriage and the baptism of children. In this case, the rites of passage follow the path set out by Catholicism.

"I always said to Pablo, I have my beliefs. At this point I don't know why, maybe because I was brought up with them, who knows... there are certain religious beliefs I hold and

[17] The Catholic community tends to refer to "mixed marriage" as being between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic (Protestant, for instance). The notion that best expresses what we refer to as exogamy is "marriage with religious disparity," which denotes the union of a Catholic and an unbaptized person.

will probably continue to hold. That won't change. But I also realized that, for me, many religious issues are related to social ones. We'll do the wedding so I can enter the church in white with my father."

With the exception of the actual moment of the marriage itself, when generally both members of the couple must confirm their Judaism, there is a clear difference in the spaces of legitimization and conflict when analyzed according to gender. Participation and recognition within community institutions is easier for women. Yamila, 27 and Jewish, is sure about the Jewish education and setting in which she wishes to raise her future children, something that she has openly discussed and agreed on with her future husband. When asked whether she would like her future husband to convert, she replies, pragmatically: "*Why would I ask him to do that? We've agreed that we're going to try and give our children a Jewish education and since I'm Jewish, I won't have a problem in any community. It doesn't seem fair or necessary to make him go through all that. It's something the two of us have discussed and that's that.*"

Exogamous Families and Continuity: How Will Our Children Define Themselves?

"No tengo muchas verdades, prefiero no dar consejos.
Cada cual por su camino, que igual va a aprender de viejo.
(…) Soy hijo de un forastero y de una estrella del alba
Y si hay amor, me dijeron, toda distancia se salva".
Jorge Drexler – Frontera

[I have few truths, I prefer not to give advice.
Our path is our own, which we'll learn when full grown.
(...) I'm the son of a stranger and of a star at dawn
And if there's love, they say, all distance is overcome.]

In seeking to understand the everyday dynamics of young couples living together, the French sociologist, Jean Claude Kaufmann, finds that "the encounter of spouses unleashes a real struggle in the foundation of their respective identities and in the way they are expressed in probing, often unresolved, questions such as: what do I keep on behalf of my ego? What and how do I change with respect to us?" (Kaufmann 1999:211-246).

These questions remain open since, in most cases, they receive no explicit answer. However, simply living together generates arguments, often tacit ones. In the same article, Kaufmann points out that most couples ignore the rules that govern their relationship and wish to continue that way, since it gives them the illusion that "it just happened". This wilful ignorance, he says, is the first unspoken rule of a relationship (Kaufmann 1999:211-246).

The previous introduction allows us to contextualize the framework of how current couples relate to each other, live together and think about their futures. This is a future with more questions than answers, a future which—as mentioned above—is not simplified by tradition and which transforms old rules into new questions. Questions that, given the characteristics of the present era, can no longer find their answers in a specific symbolic corpus (whether it be Judaism, Christianity, secularism, Protestantism, humanism, the State, the nation, etc.), but nevertheless require personal experience, experience acquired along the way, to reach some certainty with respect to the decisions being made. As Grimson notes, in the present era, the issues of connection, dynamics and experience are relevant in defining community, culture and territory (Grimson 2011:130).

The predictive inability of postmodernity or second modernity, product of a lack of certainties and processes of individuation, over-represent the role of experience and collaborative learning as a way of overcoming differences (religious, cultural, educational, etc.). Given its particular nature, experience has no guidebook and follows no specific rules. Thus Kaufmann's expression ("it just happened") to describe how couples avoid discussing everyday issues.

The issues involved in living together and the lack of tools to resolve them become even more complex with the addition of children. Ana is a clear example of how children lead to a reconsideration of certain aspects of the couple and the family, explaining "*up to that point, I had my religion and my things, he had his and that was that. Now that we have a child, it's different*." In this case, the issues considered somehow conflictive or which the couple have been avoiding, identity for instance, are expressed as "the children will choose what they want to be when the time comes[18]." To this end, Jorge reveals "*I have no desire for my children to shoulder the weight of living up to other generations' expectations. I want them to be free to do... they shouldn't have to have the burden of doing what I want them to or of my expectations*." In this context, in addition to exploring the underlying language of the parents' narrative, it is imperative that we consider the direct experience of the children who, looking back, can clarify without their parents' obsessions, what was passed on to them and what has been integrated.

But just as everyday conflicts are not resolved at random or by imposing one on another, but rather through a series of underlying negotiations and tacit agreements, we can also assume that "what the child will choose in the future" will be strongly conditioned by what they have experienced at home, their formal or informal education, the social circles they grew up in and external constraints. In that regard, Benhabib indicates that we are born into dialogic or narrative networks, from family and gender-related narratives to linguistic narratives, including master narratives of collective identity. We are conscious of who we are, learning to be conversational partners in these narratives (Benhabib 2006:44), which implies that every choice is a reference to previously accumulated meaning. As an adult, the child will reinvent his own past experience, those markers in his personal biography that moved him closer or further away.

At this point, the relevance of *significant life experiences* becomes even more meaningful. As mentioned above, insofar as these experiences transcend their particular historical moment and function as elements selected to describe one's own personal biography, they become values worthy of being shared with others and passed on to future generations.

However, this should not lead to the assumption that the family will explicitly or implicitly opt for one or another of the parents' origins, for the values and traditions of one of the parents rather than the other. The couple does not need to make that choice. With the exception of a small number of cases, in which one of the partners has a pronounced religious identity[19], generally families are formed on a aggregate basis, combining elements from both sides of the family, and the choice of one of the parents to pass on elements of their origins does not prevent the other from doing so. *Freedom's children*, as Beck calls them, do not feel compelled to reproduce or repeat past experiences. They seek to find meaning, a meaning that can be experienced in an active and everyday manner and reconciled with their particular way of life (Beck 1999:187-209).

[18] Anthropologist Daniel Bargman, in another article, refers to this process as "deliberately choosing not to choose." See (Bargman 1997:93-111).

[19] Anthropologist Daniel Bargman, in another article, refers to this process as "deliberately choosing not to choose." See (Bargman 1997:93-111).

This search is open rather than mixed. It borrows elements from reality and daily life—both inside and outside the family—that, in their transcendence, become the placeholder of the identity or identities.

The parents, for whom the great symbolic systems (state, family, church) have also collapsed, do not wish to and no longer have the option of determining this path for their children. And their children, for the same reason, can no longer use the rules of the past as more than a simple guide to be tested through experience itself.

The path of experience offers the potential for resignifying, reinventing and examining, and in doing so, supplying identities and memberships with current and relevant meaning. At the same time, given the characteristics of the era itself, it is unlikely that this identification will establish itself in an exclusive, and even less likely, exclusionary form with respect to others. As a result, aside from the fact that within the family, one of the partners may generate more and better *significant life experiences*, leading the children to forge a stronger identification with those origins. This identification will take place within the context of a relationship: it will be stronger but never unique and therefore always mixed. Alejandra is very clear about this:

> *"While on many issues I try to impose my ideas, I don't think it works. I mean... (...) it's true that I always try to explain my side of things, but I don't think so when it comes to this. It doesn't work and the only thing I'm going to do is screw up my kid's life if I'm extremely stubborn and want to baptize her and I want... what am I going to achieve? Nothing. The truth is that my daughter... I have to take responsibility for the father I chose for my daughter and my daughter will know that she has a mother that comes from this side and a father that comes from the other and well, like Pablo said earlier, she'll decide and these will be her roots, like mine, like his. I don't think she'll have a defined religion. I do think both of us will pass things on to her, because it's impossible for that not to happen."*

On the other hand, there are many opportunities for learning and they do not always come from the nuclear family or its desires. The extended family (especially grandparents), social circles and friendships can also play a role. Daniel, who could be described as an "approacher," is the child of an exogamous marriage. When his parents became a couple, neither of them felt that their ethnic or religious backgrounds could be an obstacle for the couple, since these were not identities that defined them. His family on both sides is relatively small and he lost his grandparents when he was very young. This, along with a certain degree of disinterest and the lack of someone to encourage him in this sense, meant that the opportunities for cultural and traditional encounters were greatly reduced. He went to a (non-Jewish) private technical primary school where, despite some of his classmates being Jewish, he did not find a context in which he could identify with his Judaism. In recounting how he began to identify as Jewish, he cites a milestone: when his family decided to become a member of a club (Hacoaj) and he began participating in different activities (sports, a *madrichim* leadership course, etc.). In this situation, he formed a solid group of lifelong friends, friendships that continued even during the periods he left the club and including his university years[20].

His choice of a secondary school (ORT), in addition to being based on academics, was closely tied to his group of friends. The majority were going and the school fit in with his interests and those of his parents. In short, it was an easy decision. As the family saw it, *it*

[20] The university (or post secondary) stage is a key moment in consolidating early friendships since it coincides with a period of rethinking, choosing and defining one's interests, which often involves distancing oneself from the members of early social circles. It is therefore possible at this stage to observe whether the groups continue, whether they continue and expand to include others, or whether one of their members, for the reasons cited above, becomes more distanced from the group.

was not a Jewish school with a technical orientation, it was a prestigious and solid technical school that happened to be Jewish". Secondary school served not only to consolidate his group of friends, but also to learn a little more about Jewish history, culture, religion and worldviews.

After completing the leadership course, he had a similar experience in Israel. His current partner is not Jewish, though if she had to define herself, she would not identify as Catholic either. When considering his daughters, Daniel believes, looking back at his own past, that they will probably have a similar experience in terms of freedom of choice, though he acknowledges that his case is different from his parents' in one significant way: identifying as Jewish is relevant for him when presenting himself, in explaining who he is and what his future expectations are. He reflects on it as follows:

> *"Did you have a Bar Mitzvah? No. Did you marry a Jewish girl? No. But I feel Jewish and that's just how it is (...). I think your friends get you to share many things (...) to go to Israel and start internalizing it, to read, you just feel it. And when did that happen? It was something gradual. But one day I realized that I felt Jewish."*

Stories like Daniel's—along with others, mainly "approachers" and "continuers"—are useful when considering the potential of exogamous families for continuity. If we consider that one endogamous couple is the equivalent of two exogamous couples, the impact when children of exogamous couples identify as Jewish—especially when building their own families—is exponential (Phillips 1996:73-74).

Does Assimilating Mean Disappearing?

Arnold Dashefsky begins his conclusion of *Intermarriage and Jewish Journeys* by describing a caricature in which two members of the Jewish community meet to discuss exogamous marriage. One says to the other: "Optimism on Jewish continuity requires a small change in prepositions." To which the second replies, incredulously: "Prepositions?!" and so the first answers: "Yes. Instead of us [Jews] marrying *out*, just think of it as them [Gentiles] marrying *in*!" (Dashefsky 2008:39).

This exchange captures several of the issues addressed in this study. To begin with, it questions the strength of cultural, ethnic and religious boundaries by showing that when we marry *them*, we form families that may identify more with one than the other, but nevertheless include *them* in what we tend to see as us, thereby demonstrating that the discrete and binomial way of understanding groups, although relevant, is insufficient in explaining postmodern social relationships.

On the other hand, in contemplating the possibility of *them* marrying in, the sentence questions and disregards views held by social scientists until the 1960s, which tended to see a union between a member of a minority and a majority as an act of disidentification with the group of origin in favour of the culture and worldview of the majority or mainstream, and an abandonment of their distinction as a member of a minority (Mayer 1985).

The conventional view of assimilation developed by the American sociologist, Milton Gordon, is inscribed in the concept coined by Alba as *boundary crossing*, in which individuals separate from the group, abandoning their distinctive characteristics and acquiring new ones that will allow them to join another group. For this to take place, the distinction between groups must be *clear*. One of the conditions of *crossing* a border is that there be two sides; the side one is on and the side one wishes to cross over. The clear nature of the borders suggests a discrete, interrupted, discontinuous world, where ways of relating *within* the group are completely different from relations *between* groups (Alba

2006:347-358).

As we have seen, the current reality for most Jews is best reflected through the concept of the *blurred boundary*. This is useful both for understanding a minority as well as exploring the changes introduced by this minority into the mainstream. That is, this boundary is not only porous for the minority but also for the majority, which incorporates elements that come from the minority into its culture and everyday life[21]. Alba notes that "when boundaries are porous, it often facilitates assimilation, to the extent that the individuals experiencing it will not feel a split between participating in the mainstream and social practices, families and identities. They do not feel forced to choose between the mainstream and their group of origin or experience a detachment from their group" (Alba 2006, 47:347-358). In other words, there is still at play an underlying concept of an us that distinguishes the characteristics of a group, though as a condition of the era, this definition will not be exclusionary and the rules of group entry, exit and permanence remain flexible, contingent and discursive.

The porous nature of ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries means that the majority of exogamous couples analyzed in this study do not confront the need to choose between their partners and their community, culture, tradition, nationality and even religion. In this sense, paraphrasing Alba and Nee, one could even say that these unions have ceased to be exogamous for the couples themselves, given that they do not recognize the social boundary being crossed (Alba and Nee 2003).

At the same time, as seen in the cases of Uruguay (Porzecanski 2006), Brazil (Sorj 2008:58-75) and Argentina, the scope and potential consequences of exogamy are strongly influenced by socioeconomic variables. While this trend is clearer among the lower to middle classes, given that the expression and affirmation of Judaism comes at a certain cost (Porzecanski 2006:132), it is also common among those who are well-off, given that the identification with a particular group is weakened as educational levels increase because of an emphasis on personal achievement and adherence to universal principles (Kalmijn 1998).

In any case, understanding these couples and their future expectations requires a unbiased approach in determining how and to what extent these distinctions are personally maintained (individual identity) and shared with family and community (collective identity).

[21] This porousness is reflected in what we call proximity groups, which incorporate Jewish characteristics through everyday contact. There are many current examples of this in the entertainment world. These include comedian Diego Capusotto's character Kosher Waters, targeted at a general public (which understands the message); an episode dedicated to mixed marriage by the television series Los Simuladores; and a series of films by Daniel Burman, viewed by both a Jewish and non-Jewish public. Along the same lines, we could also include Urban Passover and Rosh Hashanah, organized by the Jewish organization YOK, where anyone in Buenos Aires can learn about and incorporate elements of Judaism. Food is another area which strongly demonstrates the porous nature of the mainstream with respect to minorities. Examples include Argentines opening sushi restaurants or offering ethnic cooking classes (Jewish, Armenian, Polish, Turkish, Russian, etc.) for a general public. This also happens with certain elements of Jewish weddings (e.g. breaking a wine glass and klezmer music) which are integrated into predominantly secular weddings where neither member of the couple is Jewish.

Final Thoughts

The porousness of ethnic boundaries and the overuse of the concept of "assimilation" to describe dissimilar phenomena have led historian Jonathan Sarna, in his introduction to *American Judaism,* to clarify his sparing use of the term, more often as a description of what Jews feared would happen to them than as a depiction of what actually befell them (Sarna 2004).

In analyzing exogamy amongst American women, McGinity concludes that the challenge in a society in which this type of wedding or union is increasingly common, is for each of these families to be able to define what it means to be Jewish (2009:198).

In this respect, *significant life experiences* lend meaning and validity to identification (both individual and collective) and are the result of multiple experiences: school, clubs, friends, family, celebrations, holidays, the experience of discrimination and trips to Israel, among others. At the same time, this concept places more emphasis on values, content and the emotional significance being passed on, than on the specific nature of the couple. The endogamous label suggests that a union between two Jews in some way guarantees continuity and, by extension, Jewish children. This assumption overlooks two fundamental issues: the first is that the majority of Jews interviewed in exogamous families come from endogamous families and the second, and perhaps most important, is that to varying degrees and in different ways, exogamous families often reflect their desire to pass on culture and values associated with Judaism. It is therefore critical that more emphasis be placed on analyzing family dynamics and their trajectory than on the exogamous nature of the couple.

Similar to what Mayer and Barack Fishman have observed at different stages in the American case, generally the spouse with the strongest degree of identification and determination establishes how family heritage will be integrated into family life (Mayer 1985; Phillips 2004).

Available data is inconclusive as to whether one gender has a greater tendency than another to pass on this heritage. On the one hand, based on data of children's schooling, Rubel found that for the 1980 cohort, in exogamous families in which the mother is Jewish, there was a greater tendency to choose options for secondary school connected to the Jewish community than in families in which the father is Jewish (Rubel 2009:171-196). Women also tend to take more responsibility for maintaining traditional and cultural patterns associated with gatherings, especially for the High Holidays. In contrast, Bargman suggests incorporating "the patrilineal pattern of surname transmission" into these analyses, something which is quite common in Argentina (Bargman 1997:93-111). To this we could also add the desire of (some) circumcised fathers to carry on with the ritual when their sons are born.

On the other hand, emphasis on the family and its networks reclaims significant roles such as those of grandparents and groups of friends. Quite often, content and *significant life experiences* come not from the parents but rather from the grandparents. Depending on their ties to their grandchildren and their own role in the extended family, they may be important in the transmission of emotional content. This is particularly significant in cases in which neither the parents nor the grandparents on one side of the family (either paternal or maternal), demonstrate a particular proclivity for passing on heritage.

The assertion that it is the member with a stronger identification who often defines the issue for the family, brings up the question of continuity long before the actual marriage or union itself, going back even as far as early education. What would one wish to perpetuate

other than those things that have made them who they are as a person? And why would someone want to continue what was passed on to them in a residual way? Why continue something that, despite having been passed on and emotionally incorporated, has lost its relevance in the present?

It is the relevance of these *significant life experiences* and the capacity to extend them to the next generation that will determine to what degree exogamy is an opportunity for or a threat to the continuity of the Jewish people. In any case, if it were a threat, it would not be due to exogamy itself but rather to the prior disinterest of the Jewish partner in bestowing these experiences with continuity[22].

On this point, Cohen highlights the need to grasp how families are changing and the impact these changes have on expressions of Jewish commitment as a crucial point in understanding the prospects for continuity (Cohen 1988). Both Goldscheider, with reference to the American context, and Sorj, with respect to Latin American communities, highlight the importance of addressing the issue of family, particularly in relation to those who, without having been born Jewish or converted, identify their families as Jewish and want relatives, friends and the community to do so as well (Goldscheider 2003:18-24; Sorj 2009).

The multifaceted nature of Judaism, which exceeds religious definitions, is advantageous for Jews in mostly secular exogamous couples, given that as a culture, people, civilization or tradition, it does not represent a threat for the secular nature of the couple nor for the non-Jewish member and their ties to their origins. Thus allusions made to religious educational options (or ones considered as such) for their children are quite minimal. A Catholic school, by definition, is a school with religious content. A Jewish school, also by definition, may not have any. In this sense, schools like Sarmiento (preschool and primary) and ORT (secondary) are generally on the list of educational options evaluated.

With the increase in exogamous unions, the debates regarding the position of non-Jewish partners and their children become central and it is important to resolve them in order to formulate community development strategies. Barack Fishman locates the debate between the "left" and the "right". On the extreme left are those who advocate that both the partner and child be considered (and count as) Jews regardless of which of the two parents is Jewish, as long as they all feel (at least partially) that they form a Jewish family.

The extreme right insists that only those who can be certified according to *halakha* [Jewish Law] can be considered Jews. Many observers believe that the Jewish communities should find a way, in the near future, to reach some degree of consensus regarding this sizable group of people who are closely related, but not defined as Jewish according to current interpretations (Barack Fishman 2004:166).

Part of this debate was resolved in the United States by the reform movement (which has a significant presence in the country) when it agreed, in 1983, that children with a Jewish father would be considered under the same conditions as children with two Jewish parents, creating two currents of Judaism: Halachic and liberal (Judd 1990:251-268).

[22] Considering the challenges facing the Jewish community, professor Sarna raises a series of dichotomous questions that, with respect to the major debates of Judaism today, lead to a consideration of the community agenda over the next decade and the strategies for community development that support it. These questions are: Is it better to focus on quality to encourage Judaism or on how to increase the quantity of Jews? Should mixed marriage be seen as an opportunity or as a disaster for future generations? Should bridges be built or borders fortified? Should religious authority be strengthened or religious autonomy promoted? Should Judaism be reconciled to contemporary culture or Jewish traditions defended at its expense? Should a commitment be made to Jewish unity or a firm position taken regarding beloved Jewish principles? (Sarna 2004).

The situation in Argentina however, has its own characteristics. In the first place, religious denominations play a less prominent role (with the exception, once again, of the various orthodoxies). Taking the community of Buenos Aires as an example, only 24% of Jews report being a member or even associated with a synagogue (Jmelnizky and Erdei 2005). Of those who identify themselves as members or adherents of any religious trend, the conservative movement is the most widespread and has the most members, followed by orthodoxy (which in its modern form is currently expanding). For its part, the reform movement plays a marginal role in current Jewish life. Thus, the two main religious currents uphold the *Halachic* norms as criteria for becoming and remaining a part of the Jewish people[23].

The emergence of exogamy is most pronounced in the ranks of Jewish secularism and the majority conservative movement, in which many families are already directly or indirectly experiencing the restrictions placed on forming a Jewish family in which one of the partners is not recognized as such (or only partially so). Given the rule of matrilineal descent, these limitations are much stronger when the father is the Jewish spouse, rather than the opposite, generating a differentiated logic among exogamous couples. It is no coincidence that approximately 7 of every 10 people that convert to Judaism in the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary are women.

It is reasonable to assume, as Sorj does, that matrilineage has lost its relevance given that "Jews are no longer surrounded by pagan peoples, Jewish women are no longer subject to mass violation, and paternity is now verifiable. The real danger today is that the children of mixed marriages will be marginalized by the prejudices found in certain Jewish communities. Around half of the Jews in the Diaspora marry non-Jews, and their parents find themselves divided between maintaining their attachment to the past and accepting new rules that will not exclude their children from Judaism" (Sorj 2009:154).

It should be emphasized, however, that matrilineage cannot be questioned without a sincere and respectful debate regarding group boundaries. It is clearly no longer possible to seek a return to "the stronghold" when most Jews now feel, think and act in a completely different way, valuing contemporary openness and freedom of choice. In this sense, several social scientists, including anthropologist Fredrik Barth, point out that cultural and ethnic distinctions are not dependent on the absence of interaction and social acceptance. In fact, quite the opposite. These are the basis upon which the social systems that contain these distinctions are constructed (Barth 1976).

However, it is worth noting that all identification, in order to exist, must generate the conditions that make an individual feel *part* of the group and the group recognize them as such. Understanding collective identities as patterns of similarity and difference, Bosker Liwerant explains that "they are the result of the solidarity and trust established between the members of a group". This process largely depends on how the attributes of *similarity* are defined by members when faced with the differences represented by the Other (Bosker Liwerant 2009:79-102).

As a process, it cannot be fixed in time. It is endless and can never be resolved because its boundaries cannot be established (despite the desires of all or part of the group). It is therefore not a question of deciphering the codes of *Jewish identity* but rather of observing the form, contingency and place from which the distinct internal divisions identify as Jewish.

Beck reflects on the possibility of reconciling the desire for self-determination with the equally important desire for community and maintains that "growing individualization

[23] Source: Survey conducted by the JDC for the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in 2004.

does not completely dismantle the bonds of solidarity, but rather creates a new type of solidarity. This process is voluntary, not done out of a sense of duty. The price of greater self-determination and a diversity of opportunities appears to be a loss of direction. It leads to a demand for binding social networks that produce a sense of belonging and meaning in life" (Beck 1999:7-34).

Given a scenario such as the one described above, the possibilities for the reproduction of Judaism largely depend on the capacity to rethink the place that Jewish culture and values occupy so that the community becomes a relevant and commonplace space for identification.

These days, the concept of "continuity" is often used to refer to repetition, to a linearity in alignment with a reification of Jewishness, to carry on without asking questions, without resignifying, to maintain the agreements of the past, though their ability to explain the present may be limited.

The potential for Judaism, in all its diversity, to carry on through the coming generations is strongly affected by the creative and multifarious capacity of each generation to keep the legacy relevant, to give it current meaning, to reinterpret and to legitimize it, based not on past meanings, but rather ones to be constructed.

Judaism has managed to maintain, though not without difficulties, a series of values marginalized by the postmodern rise of individualism. It is these values that both Jewish and non-Jewish members of exogamous couples reclaim: communitarianism, family, solidarity and historical memory, among others.

In this study, we have given a detailed explanation of how this distinction can coexist in open societies (and thus is not dependent on geographic or cultural isolation). We have also examined the various schools of thought with respect to the concept of "assimilation" and concluded that both the majority and the minority appropriate aspects of the culture which contribute to "blurring" ethnic boundaries, bringing people together without requiring they distance themselves from their group of origin.

Multiple examples have been given of how the behaviour of exogamous couples is deeply related to a broader group or segment, which in turn includes a significant proportion of non-institutionalized (mostly secular) endogamous families.

The question of continuity is therefore closely related to the ability of the community to reinforce a sense of belonging in peaceful coexistence with other identities.

Rather than focusing on exogamous unions, the debate should centre on how the various Jewish communities might respond to the challenge of diversity which not only affects exogamous families, but also endogamous, blended, dysfunctional and, to a growing degree, homosexual couples and families as well.

Methodological Appendix

This article seeks to share the principal findings and ideas that emerged from the study "Identity, Exogamy and the Jewish Community," funded by the JDC International Centre for Community Development.

This study defines exogamous as all marriages or unions in which one member of the couple self identifies as Jewish and the other does not. Converts to Judaism and those currently undergoing conversion were not included in this study, given that the unions they form are essentially endogamous.

To gain a comprehensive view of exogamous families and the issues they deal with on a daily basis, we conducted 130 in-depth interviews with families in Buenos Aires.

To better understand family logic, we carried out interviews with the couples themselves as well as their children between the ages of 18 and 30.

We used a “snowball sampling” technique, with a maximum of 3 interviews carried out per facilitator.

All names in this report have been changed.

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